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THE SPRING OF SALVATION.

Time out of mind it has been customary with the fathers in their generation to stigmatize as "morbid melancholy of youth" that pessimistic thought which so often finds vogue with young men. In consequence of this the opinions of a young man who avows his pessimism are discredited beforehand. They are symptomatic of his state in life, and, though they may have, perhaps, pathological interest, they cannot be esteemed of rational value.

It is, therefore, with some hesitation that I, as a young man—opinionated, and hence under the obloquy—venture to lay bare my thinking; and before so venturing I would fain say a word in behalf of my kind. For I cannot consider *melancholia juvenutis* either reprehensible or pathological. It comes in the natural course of events, and is due to awakening self-study. Up to a certain age the young of the human family find the outer world so real and weighty and full of tantalizing objects that its inner counterpart is hardly noticed; but bye and bye the novelty wears away, mastery of the objective world, sufficient to the day's need, is achieved, and then—lo, the new world! Is it strange that in the zest and flush of youth man finds himself an interesting animal, rather more interesting than all beside? So the gaze turns inward and we have awkward self-consciousness and that inquisitive self-study which the fathers term "morbid."

One having in mind the history of thought will see how, following after revelation of the new world, the same yet not the same as the old, full of unreason and contradiction, yet not unreal, the sophists must have their day. The skepticism of youth is a shadowing of that skepticism in thought which exploitations of the inner world have ever summoned forth. But the human mind, as history shows, never long rests content with skepticism. And so the young doubter casts about for materials with which to build him a house. He finds *facts of experience*. And they are not so many but that he must take

them all. He may not cull and cull out of the manifold only the seemly. He must take all. And some are faulty and some are wry and crass. What wonder, then, if the house he builds be ugly, mad, of ruinous? What wonder, then, the pessimism? Nay, if the fathers themselves wrought into their stable mansions *all* the facts of experience, what might these mansions be?

For there are unwholesome facts in human experience. First among them is war, and with it wounds and pain and death. The survival of the fittest is the end of the fight, they tell us, and to kill is the way of life. Again, there is evil. No mere negation of good, but evil positive and black and stinking. And finally, ugliness. We are so accustomed to the traditions of a world beautiful that we are apt to forget that in these smoke-grimed days it is mainly a tradition.

Now whether pain and evil and ugliness mean any metaphysical truth or not, I think none of us can deny that in our poor irrational human experience they are very real and absolute fact. The young man accepts them as such. He meets them in the same spirit of natural curiosity with which in earlier years he met the objects of the outer world; and when he comes to frame his *Weltanschauung*, his world-vision, he includes them in it with the same naive conviction that all he finds in the world must, forsooth, belong to it. He leaves it to the fathers to construct worlds wherein no evil is, where the ugly is tinselled and the foul sweetened with perfume. Is it a wonder, then, that when he sees that the stimulus of life is pain, that the winged hopes of his happier days are but targets of fate, that the golden apples in the gardens of the Hesperides are husks and ashes, that death alone is lord of peace—is it a wonder that he comes to hold happiness to be only a chimera? Or, having felt the virulent potency of evil, having seen and loathed the vile, is it strange if he sometimes comes to doubt whether in truth there is a Power working for righteousness in the universe? And he does so doubt. Flaubert has somewhere likened life to a foul whiff from an underground laundry, and a young man, of clean mind and habit, I have heard use the same figure.

Now I hold that that attitude of mind which courageously faces the facts of experience and takes them in their full consequence is not only the most admirable, but the most true as well and the most valuable in a search for truth. Age with its conservatism and reconstruction is partisan. It has range of experience and dialectical keenness, but it is lacking in receptivity, it is not without prejudice and, one might add, cowardice. The conceptions of the fathers are like systems of philosophy, framed and fixed, but to be outgrown; whereas the thought of the young men represents rather those periods of skeptical criticism which serve as indices of new developments. Pessimistic they may be, as facts compel; but the facts are taken without fear or favor. And surely, if only for this attitude and its indicial value, the young man's thinking deserves to be considered of rational worth, not merely of pathological interest.

If the end of ethical study really were not knowledge, but conduct alone, as Aristotle said, there would be no purpose in its pursuit beyond the spheres of practical politics and applied sociology. For all action subservient to the biological need the conditions of life furnish us stimuli and direction sufficiently definite. Obeying these, we live; rebelling, we die. It is simple and inexorable enough. Nature offers us a *modus vivendi* and, perforce, we accept it. But for the civilized man it is not enough that the act of the moment he vouchsafed him, the need of the moment fulfilled. He demands a rationale in his ethical life just as he demands it in his cosmogony. He requires *motif* as well as motive for his actions. Perhaps his craving comes only from a sense of artistic fitness, a love of unity and harmony, but its satisfaction is quite as essential to his comfort as is a well-groomed person or congruous surroundings. The mediaeval search for the Summum Bonum has been transformed into a search for an adequate and appropriate *raison d'être* in the ethic world.

Now it is a prime condition of such ethical rationale—as appealing to reason—that it should not only be satisfying and desirable, but that its aim, as an end of ethical action should in some measure be attainable. An individual may erratically

buy gardens in the moon without ever expecting to pluck fruit therefrom or gain other satisfaction than his own eccentricity affords. So it is that we have the somewhat affected devotion to impossible ideals. But such cases are only the picturesque—they are without the pale of the truly artistic in ethical life. When we come to the domain of social ethics—our people's ethics upon which most intimately depends our self's own—no such eccentricity is admissible. The scientific mode of thinking makes reasonableness, and the biological fact of living makes practicability essential to our ideal. It is hardly necessary to add that attainability must be a characteristic of whatever is ethically reasonable as well as of what is practicable.

It may not be too much to assume that all ethical systems in some sort recognize human happiness, here or hereafter, as the real *Summum Bonum*. With the hedonists and utilitarians happiness in this world is avowed the good. With the intuitionists genetically at least happiness is the true ethical motive, for intuitionist ethics is almost inseparably associated with the notion of divine interposition and divine rewards and punishments in the world to come. With the perfectionists **there may be more question**. And yet perfection is understood to mean approximation to the god-like and the heavenly estate, and surely Heaven is the place of joy. "Virtue is its own reward?" Yes, but there is reward. And why was the adage called forth, why is it necessary? Is it not because virtue is accustomed to cast envious glances upon vice, whispering, Lo, it is happy! even as vice says of virtue, It is happy!—is it not, after all, because joy is implicitly recognized as the most-to-be-desired? So all systems of ethics assume, consciously or with hazy circumlocution, that the greatest good is human happiness.

And now comes the young man asserting that happiness is a chimera. He holds that a world conceived in pain, reared through brother-battles and nourished by steaming blood from the sacrificial altar can never be a happy world. Of happiness in a world to come he has no assurance, perchance no faith. It is not his fault. It is the malady of the age, and it is bitter in his heart. But it is in his heart; he is a child of his time.

Wherefore he has broken with ethics—with all the systems which declare that the happy man is the perfect man or the perfect man always the happy one. There is no ground beneath his feet—only a falling away and a falling. Is it strange, then, that he becomes skeptical and pessimistic and mad and morbid, a contumely unto his fathers?

I do not say that he values happiness less than do other men or that he is more willing to abandon the strife for it. He sees that Nature—*mater durissima!*—grants to her children that modicum of joy necessary to mere living; and being a young man not over-filial, he is ready to wrest from her what further joys chance or battling offer. Happiness in his eyes is indeed good and to be sought for; but at the same time he recognizes that the ideal of a happy world is of the unattainable and so cannot be a rational ethical ideal. For in ethics, where the ideal must determine the *motif* of a life's action, the sense of harmony and sufficient reason cannot be satisfied with an ideal which *per se* is in no wise attainable. And so our young man is in a sorry case when he casts about for materials with which to build him a house. What is worth while? he asks, as others have asked before him. What is there that is at once harmonious and reasonable and attainable and ethically satisfying?

Now if he could know the purpose of the whole world and the sum of it and the substance, he could doubtless find his place in it satisfactorily enough. But to know these things is the province of the wise men and the elders. And being wearied of the vanity of philosophies which are beyond him, he is only concerned for a candle unto his feet. But where shall he find that little light?

I think there can be but one answer. He must search for it within *his* world. If anything in all his world is pronounced worth while for him it is so. By being worth while I mean that it must satisfy the needs of ethical reason: it must be adapted to an harmonious, reasonable and attainable ethical experience. "Well, and why not happiness? It is reasonable and harmonious in human life, for all men seek it instinctively. It is in a measure attainable." Yes, in a measure, for individ-

uals; but the ideal of a happy world is an impossible ideal; there can be no such thing as a happy life which is the average life. Of course, the young man might adopt a purely egotistic hedonism if he believes that his own life may be made happy. But that would be neither reasonable nor harmonious, for it is essential to ethical reason and harmony that the ethical ideal be framed for society and not for elect individuals; and the ideal of egoistic happiness in such a sense is even more unattainable than any other.

The notion of happiness as the ethical ideal must be abandoned; and again the builder asks, What is worth while? And passing in review all his experiences, I think he will find certain of them which his consciousness will ratify as pre-eminently the worthwhile. For there are certain realities of our worlds which we reverence and love and hold to be most noble and most sufficient unto themselves. I am not here concerned with any question of a real worth beyond that which consciousness attests, nor of whether the conscious measure may be true or false, nor whether it is constant or consistent. I want only to show that we do ascribe high worthiness to some things without requiring any reason for the ascription, but instinctively and because we must. The feeling of their worth is inevitable and ultimate in our consciousness.

What are these self-sufficient experiences? Well, because they may not be defined nor narrowly mapped out, I will call them the beautiful. And if beauty seems to you a term not sufficiently broad to cover all, consider that I would extend its meaning until it does cover them. For I hold that when we speak of the noble and the pure and the exalted, of the great and the glorious, of the altogether lovely, we are not using so many empty words nor a phraseology of dreams whose substance is to be analyzed out of consciousness, but designations of very real and living experiences, as vividly potent as aught that is external. And I hold that self-abnegation and self-immolation and sympathy and the spirit of compassion are of this company; and strength and strife and fearlessness, the will to achieve, the glory of righteous battle, the magnificence of devotion unto death as well; and that which is gratifying to the

æsthetic taste, to the sense of form and color, of sound, of touch, and that which is merely appropriate and cleanly. All these I would include in the one wide term—beautiful!

Thus the life beautiful and the world beautiful is our ethical ideal. How, then, does it meet the conditions: harmony, satisfactoriness, reasonableness, attainability? They are all bound up with one another, these conditions. They form one of those complexes of consciousness the psychologists love to juggle with; and I think that when we say of anything that it is worth while we mean nothing more than that the whole complex consciousness is satisfied. Yet some answer may be made.

First, of harmony. How is the beautiful life harmonious? To reply, because it is beautiful and harmony is essential to beauty, is verbal tautology. Yet in consciousness there is no tautology, for there harmony and beauty have fixed values apart from their relationship.

Of satisfactoriness. Consciousness itself gives the warrant of sufficiency; this by hypothesis.

Of reasonableness. Whatever appeals to the human mind as worth endeavor and is at the same time harmonious and satisfactory and attainable, is it not therein reasonable?

Of attainability. Is the dream of dreams possible? Can our world, laden with so much ugliness and ever amenable to the laws of life, be made on the whole a beautiful world? I am afraid this question cannot be answered objectively nor from scientific premises. The truth is, the answer depends partly upon one's notion of beauty, but mainly upon one's opinion. The proposition is not for a *priori* determination, but for experience to demonstrate. The court of final resort is purely subjective. We are forced again to verbal tautology: the attainable beauty must mean the persistence of a type which is not impossible. So far as ethical ideals and actions are concerned, the weighty question is of belief. If I can hope for the actual incarnation of my ideal beautiful the condition is met. And the enthusiast whose mind's eye sees a world beautiful is likeliest to believe in it. Wherefore, blessed is the enthusiast!

But, after all, you will say, is not this beautiful the old ideal of happiness come back under different masking? Is it not at least the instrument of happiness, for all men know that happiness sought in her own name is coy and elusive? The beautiful has been defined as the most-to-be-desired; men most desire joy; are joy and beauty not, then, one? I had thought to be well rid of this notion of happiness, for it is but a wan hope. I will not dispute the premise that men do most desire happiness, or, at any rate, that which shall bring happiness, for it would involve much profitless talk on the meaning of this and that, on what happiness is and what desire; and, indeed, we have not words to tell what they are nor even what is their mental kin. I want only to show that for me beauty is diverse from joy, that the two do not involve each other, that they are often antagonistic. If your experience does not accord with mine, there is no more to be said.

But I have known a beautiful life—a life of courage and achievement, of generosity and sacrifice, of blithe spirit in the face of death. And the theme that life was pain, so that when he came to die it seemed not ill for him. That was a beauty without joy.

More than this, have we not all felt the sorrow of a beautiful night and the pains of a musical wind? Have we not wept with the violins and trembled with the shock of cymbals? And was this for joy? When I live Lear or Hamlet it is not because I find in their lives happiness, but because the tumultuous sorrow of Lear and the cankerous grief of Hamlet somehow ennoble and beautify my sorrows and my griefs, though they do not make them less sorrows and griefs.

So it is that the young man says, happiness is a chimera. "But what is beauty, with all the talk of it?"

I have been expecting the question long. And if I had eyes to give, and not words only, I might hope to show it. The truth is, beauty, like the geometrician's axioms, is not subject to demonstration. It is not even amenable to logical definition, for its form is not the logical form. Further, and unlike the axiom, it is not necessarily nor yet probably nor actually universal. For each consciousness it is bound to be

in some respect peculiar. Nevertheless it exists in most consciousnesses, and with definite content and meaning. What that content is I can only suggest, hoping that your consciousness will seize and ratify the suggestion, and that your beautiful and my beautiful will in some degree fall into accord. Only so may we have ground of common understanding.

And now I suspect I am beginning to be called all sorts of names. Platonist, perhaps, first of all, though I will not bother about that. But for ethics, intuitionist or perfectionist? I confess I do not like them. But let us not quarrel over names; only let us come to an understanding. To my mind perfectionism implies two conditions to neither of which I concede possibility. In the first place, the perfect is superlative—*issima*; and I do not believe that the *most* beautiful world or life I can conceive is possible, but only a world *on* the whole beautiful. Secondly, we have immemorially a triple-faced goddess, the Good, the True and the Beautiful, which the perfectionists seem to worship. And I hold this a false goddess, for I do not believe the true to be either wholly good or wholly beautiful, and I do not believe the good of common opinion (though not, of course, of my opinion) to be wholly beautiful. Concerning the use and meaning of "intuitionist" there are no such clear objections. But in general the associations of the term imply a universality of ethical insight, its inevitability and innateness, or even its divine implantation; and these I see no good reason for asserting. I had rather be called, not very euphoniously to be sure, "subjectivist"; for I hold that each man's ethical ideal must be the creation of his subjective life, and that each man must fight for his own.

And now, what of the power of beauty in ethical action? For, after all, we must return to Aristotle and concede that the end of our study is not knowledge but action. Apart from the well-known power of the nobler beauties, which have given us beautiful lives in times past and give us beautiful lives to-day, is the power of mere æsthetic taste. To prove this I would cite Petronious in Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis*, and bid you compare

him with Nero and the unclean of Nero's court. What made Petronious fair and all this foul? Surely not moral nor religious restraint, as we conceive them; surely it was the power of good taste. I know a young man—yes, another, O fathers!—a friend of mine. He is susceptible to influence; he is sociable in habit; he is without conventional religious stay or restraint; he is free of many of the notions that go to make up its morality; he does not even have instinctive recognition of all the finer moral laws. On a time this young man was thrown freely into the companionship of certain of the unclean; but the mere unæsthetic ugliness of their life and their ways revolted him, so that his soul was saved. And I know another like him and another.

The potency of beauty as an agent of salvation in individual lives is not to be denied, but can it regenerate a world? This question, like so many others, cannot be precisely answered. An answer depends first of all upon one's notion of a regenerate world. If that is of a world freed from strife and pain, from tragedy, I should say that neither beauty nor any other power can ever bring it to pass. By my notion of a world beautiful is very different from that of a "good" world, in the common sense. And indeed, I hold the latter in much the same contempt that is implied when one apologizes for another, "O, but he is good-hearted and well-meaning." It is just a well-meant world.

If we change the question: can a leaven of beauty permeate and make beautiful our world? Again there is no answer. Only time can show. But I believe that it can; and the reasons for the faith that is in me are the visions which men have seen of that beautiful world, and the power of beautiful lives which I have felt, and the potency of beautiful ideals to make lives beautiful.

Finally, what are the living means to salvation through beauty? Here once again the young man turns to his experience. Even if there be no one power working for righteousness in the universe, yet there are powers in it. The young man has felt them. Powers of evil and powers of good and powers of men's personalities,—all combatting one another,

striving for mastery of him. There are impulses of duty calling for direction. There are impulses to act calling for motive. He sees, too, that life means action; that action means war; that war means the survival of the fittest. And being but a young man and yet a barbarian, he girds himself to do battle. It is his duty to fight for his beautiful and to strive to make it conqueror among all beauties. And so the impulse of duty finds direction; and the impulse to act finds motive; and the ethical life finds its motif; and the principle of life, which is war, is not esteemed an evil thing nor a God's mistake. This is the egotistic, the individualistic principle.

Of all potencies for the moulding of life, human personality is the greatest. Through the influence of man upon man, if at all, is to be wrought the world's salvation. We are too old and worldly civilized for a new Redeemer. The power of religion as supernaturalism is passed away; hereafter religion must mean humanism. The crying need is for men and men and men who shall be apostles of beauty, each a redeemer in his kingdom. This means wars of kingdoms, conquests and defeats; but it is the only way.

I have seen some such men. I have felt their influence and the glory of it, and have seen how it has wrought regeneration. And I have seen the world, the brute world, turn and strike with lies and slander when its shame has been revealed. And I have seen young men and young women sorrowing because the lord of their kingdom was taken from them. But I think some of them have carried away its beauties with them to deck new kingdoms.

Now this is the altruistic principle: that the conqueror loses himself and his personality in that he conquers. For if my beautiful is to conquer and become the living beautiful of the whole world, it must be appropriated by all men, and then it is no longer mine. So it comes to pass that "whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it." Nevertheless, it is the duty of each, as it is the law of nature, that each shall fight for his life.

So the spring of salvation is the Beautiful.